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ABSTRACT

The long range goals for preschool education in Illinois are described in this report, with emphasis on three important concepts: (1) cooperation of all levels of education in supporting the concept of early education, (2) necessity of educating teachers in this specific profession, and (3) incorporating early education programs in the public school structure. This paper lists a number of objectives, and defines and describes the criteria by which these objectives may be judged to have been accomplished. (Author/CS)

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[PLANNING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN ILLINOIS]

Abstract

Program Planning in the educational field has caused educators to stop and reflect on what they are doing and where they are going. In Illinois, all school districts must begin a planning process in order to comply with State Education Regulations.

The planning process has been in operation at the State level for the past two years and the document, Action Goals for the Seventies provides a framework and direction to planning at the State level. In the Pre-School area, only broad directions have been indicated since it is the philosophy of the Agency to allow the local districts to determine priority areas for development. The long range goals and objectives indicated in this presentation emphasizes three important concepts:

1. Cooperation of all phases of education in supporting the concept of early education.
2. Necessity of educating teachers in this specific role.
3. Incorporating early education programs in the public school structure.

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Planning programs at the State level is, at best, a gigantic task. Planning programs in the area of early childhood education is an even more awesome task for there is little precedent at this level of education for complete State programs.

Planning of itself is not a new concept, but educational planning has caused a disturbance in the academic community. We in Illinois have required planned special education programs since 1965, and beginning in July of 1973, the new regulations for State recognition require all districts to formulate a plan to cover all facets of the educational program. It is the desire of the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction that local districts assume the responsibility for planning at the local level rather than imposing a State-wide program.

Planning within the State office and projecting a direction for the 1,085 school districts in planning has been in operation for the past two years. A document entitled Action Goals for the 70's is the culmination of educational directives gleaned from educators and interested citizenry throughout the State. These Goals affect all educational areas from pre-school through adult education.

The document itself is not cast in bronze but continually reassessed and re-evaluated to make it a viable, working document.

In considering a state-wide direction for a State as diverse as Illinois, one must cope with numerous variables. In the socio-economic aspect alone, there is the metropolitan area of Chicago, suburban areas on the north shore, and urban centers in the north, central, and southern sectors from Rockford near the Wisconsin State line to Cairo just across the Kentucky border.

The rural areas of Illinois are vast, and the one room school house still exists in isolated areas. There are but a few contingencies intertwined in educational planning in Illinois. Regardless of the existing variables, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and its Superintendent, Michael J. Bakalis, have set forth a course of action for education in the Action Goals for the 70's.

Historically, the early childhood education programs have come under State jurisdiction only recently. In Illinois, it was in 1970 that the legislature mandated school districts to provide kindergartens while allowing parents the prerogative of sending the child or not. In 1971, the legislature passed bills to insure educational opportunities for exceptional children from ages 3-21.

Pressure groups of citizens are asking for day care programs with an educational component for all children.

The issue of day care has presented additional impetus to the early childhood focus in education. There is much debate as to whether young women should leave the role of homemaker and mother. Conservative forces argue for the traditional point of view and the sanctity of the home. Representatives of feminist groups would have us believe that such a traditional role is stultifying and rewarding to today's young and educated women. To continue a debate of these issues is to waste our time and energy. For even as we argue, the fact remains that young wives are verging away from the traditional roles, probably for a multitude of reasons. The need for day care expands as we wring our hands and debate whether the need for day care should expand.

Regardless of our personal viewpoints, it is no longer realistic to hold the opinion that we should not in some way provide for the needs of children under five. It is not realistic to vaguely wish for a return to the family structures familiar to our childhood. Nor is it realistic to withhold day care from young families in the belief that such family structures will then be forced to return. It is realistic to assess the emerging trends in American society and to plan programs to meet emerging needs.

CURRENT STATUS OF WOMEN

In the 1970 census, there were, in Illinois, three million, twenty-three thousand, one hundred and eight (3,023,108) females, ages twenty to sixty-five. Of these, one million, five hundred and fifty-seven thousand (1,557,000) were employed in the same year according to U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics. In other words, 51% of the women in Illinois between the ages of 20 and 65 were employed in 1970.

On a nationwide basis, women account for 37.8% of the labor force--two out of every five American workers are females. There is a continuous influx of married women to the labor force. Since 1940, there has been a 320% increase in the number of married women seeking employment. By 1969, 5.4 million of the 50.5 million families in the U.S. were headed by women, which is the highest recorded to date. According to the 1970 census, two hundred and ninety seven thousand (297,000) of the two million, seven hundred and eighty three thousand (2,783,000) families in Illinois are headed by women. This constitutes 11%. All these statistics point to an increasing need for day care facilities or early childhood education. In 1970, there were one million, one hundred and forty-six thousand, seven hundred and ninety-three (1,146,793) children age five and under in the State of Illinois.

The demand for early childhood education for these children must be considered

as a priority item. A variety of possibilities already exist through the following avenues: 1) Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2) Illinois Department of Public Aid, 3) Model Cities Program, and 4) Head Start. In addition, universities and colleges also conduct programs, and a growing number of private firms are moving into the area.

According to the Department of Children and Family Services, there has been a 62.7% increase in the number of day care centers and day care homes in the last six years. This growth does not begin to meet the need for only 18.3% of the total number of children, age three and four, could be accommodated.

A number of questions arise from this information. Many have no immediate answers, but the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction is attempting to find answers.

1. Is coordination of existing day care programs in the State necessary?
2. If deemed necessary, what agency should constitute the spearhead of the drive?
3. How can we expand early childhood education programs to meet the growing needs--particularly in areas of economic deprivation?
4. Where will funds to make these programs available be obtained if we assume the conservative cost of $900.00 per year, per child?

PS 006707

5. Should the early childhood education programs constitute a downward extension of the public school program as it is known today?

6. Or should early childhood programs exist independently, thereby allowing for new alternatives and approaches, such as an entirely home-based model?

7. If programs are allowed to exist independently, how will later problems of articulation be solved as the children enter the public schools?

8. In the event that a wide variety of programs exist, can we guarantee equal educational opportunity for each child?

9. Should teachers in the programs be certified? If so, by what agency? Who shall provide the training?

10. The only question which we no longer have the time to ask is whether or not early childhood education should be provided.

In delineating the parameters for early childhood education, certain basic elements or constants had to be determined. Three important considerations were:

1) What types of educational programs should the State propose at the pre-kindergarten level?

2) What involvement of the universities, colleges, associations, and parent groups is necessary?

3) What kinds of educational experiences are essential for professional personnel?

The following Action Objectives were developed as priority concerns for the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction in the early childhood education area:

Action Objective #1:

By 1973-74, a cooperative working arrangement among institutions of higher education, parent groups, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and other agencies should be implemented to establish models for prekindergarten curriculum and parent education programs.

Action Objective #2:

By the 1973-74 school year, colleges, universities, and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction will provide preservice training and inservice retraining of teachers and aides for prekindergarten programs.

Action Objective #3:

By school year 1974-75, models for prekindergarten (education) curriculum will have been established and disseminated to every school district in the State.

Action Objective #4:

By the 1974-75 school term, parent education and counseling programs will be established in every district offering early childhood education.

Action Objective #5:

By the 1976-77 school term, every school district will provide a pre-kindergarten program for children, ages three and four. The enrollment in such programs will be permissive.

Action Objective #6:

By 1975, every preschool child will be screened and diagnosed for learning disabilities.

REASSESSMENT OF THE ACTION OBJECTIVES

In order to make the Action Objectives functional, Accomplishment Plans for each objective were formulated. Time lines have been reassessed and are still in the future. Activities to be presented are broad and flexible so as to allow creativity and initiative to flourish.

Action Objective #1: By 1975-76, a cooperative working arrangement among institutions of higher education, parent groups, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and other agencies should be implemented to

establish alternate models for prekindergarten curriculum and parent education programs.

Definition or Description of the Accomplishment of this Action Objective:

By June, 1976, an Advisory Council for Early Childhood Education will be established to assist the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction with the development of guidelines for the creation, evaluation, and maintenance of alternative models of early childhood and parental education in Illinois. These models will provide school districts with exemplary early childhood programs for young children in general and will not only concentrate on those geared specifically to handicapped children. The council shall assist the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction in determining: (1) which types of models consistent with the goals for educational individualization in Illinois should be implemented, (2) the number and geographical location of models, (3) staffing and operational needs of each, and (4) the types of services which each model will provide.

Experimental model programs to be developed by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, with the assistance of the Advisory Council, shall provide a variety of operating programs illustrating various means of meeting the needs

of young children, a variety of uses of instructional materials, and viable methods of educational intervention. The Advisory Council shall assist in designing evaluative criteria for determining the effectiveness of each model before it receives the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction's sanction as a recommended program of Early Childhood Education.

From observation of these models and the advice and recommendations provided by the staff, school personnel and other interested agencies will have an opportunity to choose an educational model most appropriate for their needs as they become involved in providing early childhood programs in their local school systems.

In addition, the Council will assist the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction in the development of an early childhood informational system which will collect and distribute a continually updated report of successful experimental programs, viable instructional methods, new material developments, inservice training programs, and a listing of persons or agencies whose professional assignments include auxiliary services to young children.

The informational system will serve as a clearing house for the dissemination of new developments in the field of early childhood and parental education in

Illinois, and from it, all agencies whose concerns involve young children will be made aware of current research and material developments within the field, thus minimizing the duplication of services and research within the State. Definite time specific activities have been developed to carry out this goal as well as those that follow.

Action Objective #2: Colleges, universities, and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction will provide preservice training and inservice retraining of teachers and aides for prekindergarten programs by the 1975-76 school term.

Definition of the Accomplishment of this Action Objective:

By the 1975-76 school term, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction will have developed and shall be prepared to utilize the following sets of guidelines and evaluation instruments in assisting institutions in preservice training and inservice retraining of teachers of prekindergarten aged children. Training programs will be concerned with the educational needs of teachers of young children in general and will provide services needed by school districts in complying with the legislation to be enacted in the accomplishment of Action Objective #3. While these training programs may be of assistance

in teacher-training for young handicapped children, the accomplishment plan for this objective is not directed exclusively to teachers of the handicapped.

1) Set of criteria for evaluating and approving the preservice teacher-training programs in early childhood education existing in universities and colleges in Illinois.

2) Guidelines for the development of new programs for preservice teacher-training in early childhood education at the university and college level which will meet criteria for approval by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

3) Guidelines for implementing workshops in local school districts for retraining of teachers and aides whose previous training was directed toward the elementary school but who now are or will be teaching pre-kindergarten children.

All existing teacher-training programs in early childhood at the university and college level in Illinois will be identified and evaluated on the basis of the criteria developed by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction for that purpose and through the cooperative efforts of the Early Childhood Education Unit of the Elementary and Secondary Education Department and Teacher Certification Department.

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction will provide three types of assistance to educational institutions desirous of State approval for their existing early childhood teacher-training programs or for new programs yet to be developed.

1) Assistance to colleges and universities for preservice teacher training programs

Those institutions whose programs do not meet the standards outlined in the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction's guidelines will be encouraged to restructure present programs or initiate new ones which will meet the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction's stipulations. Presentation of an approved plan of program improvement must include the goals of the proposed new program as well as the means and techniques for evaluating.

2) Assistance for inservice retraining of early childhood teachers and aides sponsored by universities, colleges, or local school districts

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction shall provide, to local school districts, colleges, or universities, guidelines from which State approved workshops for retraining of teachers in early childhood may

be developed and evaluated. In addition, advisory and training personnel, and research or statistical data available to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and related to proposed teacher-training programs will be provided to those institutions who design for retraining programs comply with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction's guidelines and have been approved by that office.

3) Assistance for research leading to innovative teacher-training programs in early childhood

Experimentation by colleges and universities in developing innovative preservice teacher-training programs will be encouraged through the provision to those institutions of monetary grants and advisory and statistical assistance when those proposals appear to be feasible, innovative, and indicate a reasonable degree of probably success within the guidelines established by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Implementation of Prekindergarten Objective #2 will result in a standardized means of evaluating all teacher-training programs for early childhood in Illinois and the formulization of a set of guidelines to be utilized in establishment of new teacher-training programs. Teachers of young children in Illinois will have received training directly related to their students' developmental and

behavioral levels, and the provisions for inservice retraining of teachers will insure that they are continuously aware of new developments in their area of specialization and are provided with the means of implementing these resultant findings into classroom procedures.

Through the cooperation of university personnel and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction in providing for the best possible teachers for young children, coordination of expertise in the field of early childhood education will have been accomplished and can be expected to provide better educational learning environments for young children than were possible when the groups were separated and their goals segmented and relatively short-termed.

Implementation of Objective #2 provides an impetus for experimentation into innovative teacher-training programs for early childhood education by combining the facilities and personnel of the institutions of higher education with advisory assistance provided by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. As a result of these cooperative efforts, a greater number of research projects become feasible and much needed long term follow-up research projects will be made possible. With the creation of continuing inservice programs within school districts of Illinois, the results from these research projects can be

implemented directly into the public schools, thus providing for continued improvement of the education of young children.

Revised Action Objective #3: By September, 1979, every school district will provide a prekindergarten program for children, ages three and four. Enrollment in such programs will not be mandatory.

Definition of the Accomplishment of this Objective:

By 1979, local school districts will provide educational experience for all three and four year olds in Illinois and not be restricted to handicapped children. The framework of this objective will be set out in Action Objective #1 and #2, Prekindergarten. Local school districts will be provided with a variety of educational model programs for three and four year olds which are sponsored and approved by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction will be responsible for the approval of program plans for three and four year old children. Legislative action will be obtained to provide funding for these programs geared for three and four year olds in general, not specifically for handicapped children. Consultative services will be available from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. By September, 1979, programs for three and four year olds will be operational.

The last Action Objective for consideration is as follows: "To develop improved procedures and techniques for the identification, diagnosis, and prescriptive teaching of exceptional prekindergarten children."

Definition or Description of the Accomplishment of this Action Objective:

By June 30, 1975, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction will have determined and disseminated to local school districts effective procedures and techniques for the identification, diagnosis, and pre-program services for exceptional prekindergarten children. This will be accomplished by means of: (1) Assessing identification and diagnostic instruments and procedures; (2) Conducting various reliability and validity studies of the DIAL screening instruments; (3) Establishing an interagency planning council; (4) Establishing sources of funding and guidelines for program services; (5) Evaluating early childhood programs in the State of Illinois; (6) Reviewing current research and literature; (7) Providing inservice and direct consultation to local school districts; (8) Disseminating information to local school districts; (9) Establishing guidelines and funding of Regional Early Identification and Child Study Centers, and (10) Planning procedures of an information storage and retrieval system and an interagency communication network.

Activities Necessary to Accomplish Objectives are as follows:

1. Design procedures and develop/recommend/select instruments for screening and child study activities to be used with prekindergarten exceptional children.

2. Establish an interagency planning council for the purpose of early identification, diagnosis, and prescription of all exceptional pre-kindergarten children.

3. Project number of children needing services during the school year and establish sources of funding.

4. Provide direct assistance to local districts in establishing early childhood program services for exceptional children.

5. Design and implement an evaluation system to assess effective procedures in delivering services to exceptional prekindergarten children.

6. Design and implement a dissemination plan for relating early childhood program information to the field.

7. Prepare guidelines for the development of Regional Educational Screening and Child Study Centers with the assistance of the interagency Planning Council and an appointed Guidelines Committee in coordination with the Low Incidence Continuum Project.

8. Formulate legislation to fund staffing and construction of Regional Early Identification and Child Study Centers in coordination with Low Incidence Continuum Project.

9. Design procedures of information storage, retrieval, and dissemination for all prekindergarten children diagnosed in need of special services.

10. Establish legislation for funding the system, and delineate each code department's responsibility.

In summary: Directions for continued involvement in early childhood programs are emerging for Illinois.

1). A defined need for programs for young children as indicated by the increased number of children needing day care services.

2). A need to understand the concepts of early childhood education by parents and educators.

3). Involvement and cooperation of all agencies toward a unified rather than fractionated effort in early childhood education.

4). Cooperation by universities, colleges, associations and parent groups toward the planning phase of such a program.

5). Training programs for professional personnel to accept a specific role.

6). Investigation of all avenues of early childhood education programs for all children within the public schools

Early childhood appears to be the last frontier for exploration in the educational system. Young children are unsophisticated and react spontaneously. Perhaps, in this educational endeavor of the 1970's, we shall have concrete proof that "A Little Child Shall Lead Them."